8. Dumitru Stăniloae's Recovery of Saint Gregory Palamas' Thought and its Multiple Significations[1]

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Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the significance of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae's recovery of St Gregory Palamas' thought in Romania and abroad. I claim that Fr Dumitru's attempt to make St Gregory Palamas' theology a dominant theological current in the Orthodox world was accompanied by efforts at the recovery and re-establishment of the texts of the *Philokalia* in Orthodox spirituality. Fr Dumitru used both, consituting a change of mind and of heart, as part of an attempt at making Romania more Orthodox. In doing so, he influenced similar attempts abroad.

Keywords: Stăniloae, Palamas, *Philokalia*, Neopalamism.

Introduction

The centrality of Palamite thinking in Father Stăniloae's neopatristic synthesis is almost a commonplace topic of discussion and its importance has already been accepted by many commentators (Meyendorff 1980; Louth 2002; Ică jr. 2009). Saint Gregory Palamas was not just the main "source" of Father Stăniloae's dogmatics, but he was also considered a "master for spiritual contemplation" (Costa de Beauregard 2002, p.154).

[1] I would like to warmly thank Cristian Iftode, Manuel Sumares, Laurenţiu Gheorghe and Constantin Vică who considerably improved the quality of this study by unconditionally offering me their generous support. I also wish to thank Constantinos Athanasopoulos who carefully reviewed the final version of the text and gave me many useful suggestions. However, without a doubt, the failings of this present scientific attempt are all mine.

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Furthermore, as was often remarked, "[a]mong all the Church Fathers […] none had a greater influence on Stăniloae's thought than Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, perhaps because they were the most creative and daring Eastern theologians after the Cappadocians" (Bartoş 2002, p.209; see also Berger 2013). The main spiritual lesson Father Stăniloae learned from the former theologian was "the submersion of the concept of deification in the ocean of Christology, through a double transfiguring motion: the incarnation of the Logos first justifies and then determines the deification of the human person". As regards the latter theologian, it has been stated that "the model employed by Stăniloae receives its final form from Gregory Palamas, through the involvement of the personal uncreated divine energies in the process of deification" (Bartoş 2002, p.209).

Despite being strong and constant, the relationship between Father Stăniloae and Saint Gregory[2] is a complex one, as well as being an extremely lively one; as such, it deserves meticulous analysis. The complexity in question derives, however, from the depth and richness of the spiritual lessons involved, both theoretical and practical, and not from some kind of hesitation by the Romanian theologian or from the message expressed in the Palamite texts.

In what follows, my modest aim consists of trying to sketch some crucial points that define, with clarity, the framework of this relationship in the context of what might broadly speaking be called the history of ideas. Besides these kinds of considerations, my paper will also present some relevant aspects of Father Stăniloae's biography. Thus, without claiming to exhaust the subject, I shall structure my presentation according to the following points and I will briefly present the following:

a. The peculiar place of several Palamite "ideas" in Father Stăniloae's work.
b. The significance of the discovery of Saint Gregory's writings for Father Stăniloae's personal Christian mission.
c. The significance of Father Stăniloae's exegesis of Saint Gregory's writings for the destiny of Orthodoxy and hesychasm in Romania.
d. The role played by Father Stăniloae's work on Saint Gregory in the remarkable rediscovery of Palamite ideas in their original form for twentieth century Orthodoxy and the whole of Christianity.

[2] From now on, I simply use "Saint Gregory" instead of the whole name ("Saint Gregory Palamas"). Of course, all the citations remain the same as they are in the original.

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Before briefly surveying the above-mentioned points, I wish to underline that, theologically speaking, the relation between Saint Gregory and Father Stăniloae is, in my view, important in two senses: as a way to reaffirm and show in a proper light the thought of Saint Gregory; and as a clear and powerful educative means to assert that "contemporary" Orthodoxy (always) has (to find) its sense only in the depths of tradition, i.e. in the enduring truth of faith.

A. The peculiar place of several Palamite "ideas" in the work of Father Stăniloae

One must speak here about some of Father Stăniloae's conceptions, which were heavily influenced by what might be called Palamite positions. Certain scholars have already tried to explore this topic. Agachi, for instance, lists "four main areas where Stăniloae was highly influenced by Gregory Palamas" (2013, p.14), concerning several of his studies and books. These include: his entire interpretation of the history of the Church; the theme of deification; the distinction between essence and energies; and the liturgical aspect that embellishes all of his work.

However, my purpose here is neither to thoroughly review all these points nor to investigate any of them in minute detail. Instead, I will briefly highlight some of the aspects that seem relevant to me in the context of our present discussion, which is not particularly focused on "theoretical" analysis.

Firstly, and given the goal of my article, I wish to stress the *personalist character* of Father Stăniloae's theology. As Andrew Louth aptly remarks (2002, pp.61-62), Father Stăniloae revives, through his writings, what he calls "the traditional (patristic and classical) ideal of the human person as a microcosm". Louth cites Stăniloae, who states that:

> "[…] the more correct way would be to consider man as a macrocosm, because he is called to comprehend the whole world within himself, as the one capable of comprehending it, without losing himself, for he is distinct from the world. Therefore, man effects a unity greater than the world exterior to himself, whereas on the contrary, the world, as cosmos, as nature, cannot contain man fully within itself, without losing him, that is, without losing in this way the most important part of reality, that part which, more than all others, gives reality its meaning. The idea that man is called to become a world […] has a more precise expression, however, in the term 'macro-anthropos'" (1994, p.4).

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We find here a fruitful deepening of this classical position through the powerful echoing of Saint Maximus' and Saint Gregory's views on the topic. In conclusion, for Louth this inspired appropriation decisively places "the personal at the centre of Fr. Dumitru's doctrine of creation and gives the personal cosmic significance".

Secondly, what might be labelled here theological personalism is closely linked to the topic of *deification*. Alongside other thinkers, like Andrew Louth or Norman Russell, Paul M. Collins sees Father Stăniloae as one of the contemporary theologians who "have argued that the doctrine of deification, which is a core feature of Orthodoxy, is part of an overarching conceptuality of the divine purposes in creating and redeeming the cosmos in Orthodoxy". To put it succinctly, the Orthodox theological discourse on deification in the twentieth century (and consequently that of Father Stăniloae too) was, in Collins' view, dominatedby two figures: Saint Maximus and Saint Gregory. It may be stated then that "[t]he conceptuality of deification in Orthodoxy today is a synthesis of the ideas of these two writers constructed by Orthodox authors in the twentieth century" (2010, p.76).

Of decisive importance in this context is *the distinction between essence and energies*. K. Ware was one of the first to emphasize its significant role not only in the work of Father Stăniloae itself, but also in the context of the entirety of Orthodox dogmatics. Broadly speaking, the presence of the Palamite contribution to contemporary Orthodox theology is as summarized in the following: "The Palamite teaching is ignored in the Dogmatic of Androutsos and allowed no more than a passing mention in that of Trembelas. There is no reference to it in the main text of Fr. Michael Pomazansky's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, although a few lines are devoted to St. Gregory Palamas in an appendix". Unsurprisingly, K. Ware states that the central place Father Stăniloae "assigns to this distinction is a new and significant development so far as the works of modern dogmatic theology are concerned. […] Fr. Dumitru's is thus the first dogmatics in which the distinction is seen as fundamental to the Orthodox understanding of God" (cited in Agachi 2013, p.20).

I also suggest that Olivier Clément gives evidence for the claim that Father Stăniloae applies this Palamite distinction to his anthropology, thus trying to show that each person is an inaccessible secret revealed only by the grace of love (1993, p.84). I distance myself, therefore, from positions like that of A. N. Williams, for whom Father Stăniloae, in this particular context, "holds firm to the notion that we have access only to the divine as it is manifested in the created realm but seems to regard the distinction as notional, articulating a position that sounds rather

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Thomistic" (1999, p.200).

On such firm Palamite grounds, Father Stăniloae could keep together (and keep alive!), in man's relation with God, both accessibility and inaccessibility[3]; proximity and distance. In this way, he could make sense of a conception of knowledge based on personal behaviour (i.e., effort) aimed at attaining what is close to you and constitutes your innermost and valuable essence.

This problem is intimately linked to the way in which we conceive (or, better, we live in) God, and with that of the philosophical influence seen in Western Scholastic theology. In this sense, the peculiar contribution of Saint Gregory, to which Father Stăniloae explicitly adheres, is:

> "[…] to put into light a concept about God which is superior to the one that reduces Him to an essence conceived in a simplistic manner, or to an essence that ignores His works, being preoccupied only by His unity and not understanding that God is present in His works as a triadic unity of persons, which is something else than the simplistic unity of the philosophers" (1977, p.222).

It is also possible to see in the last writings published by Father Stăniloae a revival of this crucial Palamite distinction. I. Ică Jr. appreciates that this is due to P. Chrestou's modern critical edition of Saint Gregory's works published in 1962. He also states that we find in Father Stăniloae's first volume of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (*Teologia dogmatic ortodoxă*), from 1978, an "extraordinary rewriting of the chapter about the divine attributes [which are] all presented as divine energies communicated to the creatures as real participations to God" (Ică Jr. 2009, p.36). It has been argued that in all three volumes of this eloquent neopatristic approach, "the essential concepts of St Gregory Palamas have played a significant role", enabling us to speak about "*the systematic character of Father Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite contribution*" (Agachi 2013, p.2 my emphasis)[4].

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[3] An aspect that is well captured by the subtitle chosen by Constantinos Athanasopoulos for his 2015 edited volume, *Triune God*: *Incomprehensible but Knowable—The Philosophical and Theological Significance of Saint Gregory Palamas for Contemporary Philosophy and Theology*.

[4] A brief but necessary remark on the use of the term "Neo-Palamite", and even that of "Palamite". Of course, the discussion could be the same for "Neo-Palamism" (the latter is not used by me, but has appeared in the works of some of the authors cited). Agachi not only uses the first term, but he also includes it in the title of his work on Saint Gregory: *The Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae* (2013). Terms like these are not intended, at least by me, to be used in a

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Of course, for Father Stăniloae Saint Gregory's thinking is not a closed "container" of theological ideas, some being useful for his own theological systematization, but an invaluable "source" that also irradiates and illuminates the writings of his predecessors—what might broadly be considered a hermeneutic tool.

For instance, speaking about Saint Maximus and his appreciation of Melchizedek as offering an expression of the uncreated and divine grace that exists beyond eternity, [above] all being and all time, Father Stăniloae considers that, thereby, he refers to the teaching of Saint Gregory before Saint Gregory himself (Berger 2013, p.20, n.75).

In addition, as a concrete example, we can see that for him:

> "When we put the ideas of St. Gregory Palamas together with those of Gregory of Cyprus we may rightly consider that the former throws fresh light on the thought of the Cypriot. The irradiation of the Spirit from the Son is nothing other than the response of the Son's love to the loving initiative of the Father who causes the Spirit to proceed" (Stăniloae 1980, p.31).

It has been stated that some readings of Staniloae's views on topics developed by other contemporary theologians were informed by Saint Gregory's thinking. For instance, C. Berger appreciates that Father Stăniloae's analysis of Father Bulgakov's theory of *kenosis* "reveals a key-feature of his synthesis: the permanent intertwining of the thinking of Saint Maximus with that of Saint Gregory Palamas" (2013, p.15).

I think that here, also, would be the place to briefly mention the importance of the content of *practical* Palamite theology for Father

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somewhat reified way, as expressing an attribute or a quality of a theological position in itself or, moreover, the mark of a school/current of thought. They only designate the active and decisive presence (and, as such, the retrieval) of some of Saint Gregory's ideas (concepts, distinctions, etc.) in the works of some of the important theologians of the twentieth century. However, this is not the road followed by Agachi, for whom Neo-Palamism has a doctrinal character, being the "presentation and interpretation of Palamism in the modern period" (2013, p.2). I fully agree here with Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (2011), for whom this kind of occurrence are *per se* intimately linked with the rejection of hesychasm as a real practice for the "textual theory" of Saint Gregory, and refer to his ideas only from an abstract, literal point of view. It would be, and I accept this, something strange and false for an Orthodox theological approach. Synthetically, in the words of Metropolitan H. Vlachos, "the terms «palamite» and «neopalamite» theology belong outside the Orthodox Tradition and are a danger to the foundations of Orthodox theology".

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Stăniloae. The ideas we referred to above were, in his view, not abstract, simple cognitive assertions, but mandatory landmarks; real teachings for a concrete Orthodox spiritual ascension. This aspect can be well understood in the light of Metropolitan H. Vlachos' opinions about the impossibility of splitting (or of separately "analysing") the teachings on "the relationship and the difference between Essence and Energy, as expressed by Saint Gregory Palamas" in terms of the practical matrix of the hesychast tradition, which for him "is in fact the path for a personal partaking of the uncreated energy of God" (2011).

Speaking about these uncreated energies working within us, which are distinct from the divine being that remains incommunicable, Father Stăniloae explicitly acknowledges that Saint Gregory's attempt at emphasizing them made him understand "the importance which Holy Fathers gave to the work of God in believers, to continuous transformation done by God, to deification. I understood that God is not closed in Himself and that men are not separated from Him and between them" (Lemeni 2013, p.130, n.370; Lemeni cites the interview given by Father Stăniloae to F. Strazzari and L. Prezzi in 1989). This aspect is further developed in this paper, since it is connected with other points of my analysis.

b. The significance of Father Stăniloae's discovery of Saint Gregory's writings for his personal Christian destiny

In this sense, we should note that the Palamite works changed, in a particular and effective way, and continuously shaped Father Stăniloae's Orthodox spiritual destiny. It is well known that Father Stăniloae initially abandoned the theological direction in his youth and joined the Faculty of Literature at the University of Bucharest for one year (1923-1924), disappointed in how the former could really contribute to his Christian evolution.

Only Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan's[5] insistence determined him to restart and finish his theological studies in Cernăuţi[6], where he also obtained his Ph.D. He then continued his studies in Germany, followed by many stages in Athens, Munich, Berlin, Paris, etc. From 1927 to 1929, he discovered and intensively worked in these libraries on the Palamite manuscripts, making copies, and finally using them in his seminal monograph on Saint Gregory (1938) (Berger 2013, p.10).

[5] Nicolae Bălan (1882-1955) was the Metropolitan of Transylvania from 1920 until his death.

[6] Situated in Romania, at that time.

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As I have already stressed, the discovery of the Palamite texts did not just represent a simple "scientific" discovery, but also a profound shaping of his own destiny. Father Stăniloae confessed that in the writings of Saint Gregory he "found a God Who comes to man, opening Himself to him as light through prayer. God fills the man with His energies, remaining however incommunicable […] incomprehensible, apophatic" (cited in Berger 2013, pp.9-10).

In the first instance, we should stress that Father Stăniloae's separation from an entire tradition, one that was not only dominated by abstract Western Scholastic and philosophical theology, but also one, in form at least, that contained some of the most important achievements of Orthodox theology and which had a big impact in his time, as exemplified by Androutsos[7] and Trembelas[8]. Father Stăniloae had an accurate knowledge of this kind of manual of theology, being the translator into Romanian of Androutsos' course on dogmatics in 1930.

I would go even further here by stressing that only this separation could really give birth to a neopatristic synthesis. R. Bordeianu, who firmly contends that Father Stăniloae offers such an attempt, in the spirit of what G. Florovski conceived, leads us to believe such a statement and presents, in order to support his thesis, the "theological and biographical elements that attest to Stăniloae's departure from a manual of theology" (2013, p.240). Some interpreters even stated that Father Stăniloae was "among the first to break with the scholastic approach that dominated Christian theology during the first half of the twentieth century" (Turcescu 2002, p.7; for discussion on this point, also see Louth 2002, especially p.62, and Henkel 2002).

For D. Lemeni, Father Stăniloae, in his original neopatristic synthesis, left Scholasticism behind in a twofold sense, in an attempt to answer Androutsos' academically fashioned *Dogmatics*. Firstly, he aimed to replace this kind of abstract intellectualism with a strong appeal to "the criterion of the hesychast-type mystical experience". Secondly, he sought to oppose Thomistic essentialism—a "communitarian personalism as a model of triune and ecclesiastical communion between God and creation" (2013, p.122, n.351).

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[7] Chrestos Androutsos (1869-1935) was an eminent Greek theologian and professor of dogmatics at the University of Athens and the author of an influential *Dogmatics*, a systematic exposition of Orthodox doctrine (Ohme 2011).

[8] Panayotis Trembelas (1886-1977) was an important Greek theologian, influenced by the thought of C. Androutsos, author of *Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, which was for thirty years the official manual used by students in Greek theological faculties (Arjakovsky 2014, p.181).

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Here I should also mention the so-called religious philosophy, developed mainly in Russia, by thinkers who saw Orthodoxy as an original answer to the problems of contemporary philosophy. To put it briefly, it was asserted that both "academic theology", like that of the already mentioned Androutsos and Trembelas, and the religious philosophy of Soloviov, Bulgakov, Florenski, etc., although being "big impact theologies" and different from each other, were, in their deep essence, "abstract and speculative theologies […] isolated somehow from the Orthodox ecclesial framework, from the liturgical experience and, in general, from all that constitutes Orthodox spirituality" (Lemeni 2013, p.121). We should also speak about the true and lively relation that man has with God, and here the role of Saint Gregory for Father Stăniloae was indeed a decisive one. As he acknowledged himself:

> "Both dialectical theology and the theology of St Gregory Palamas made me see a living God, a personal God; yet, while in dialectical theology God was separated from man, because of the latter's incapacity to discard his sins, in the Palamite theology God is moving towards man, when He is invoked through praying. In dialectical theology, I have found the image of a detached unemotional God, whereas, in Palamite theology, I have encountered a God that is close to man, who opens up to man, enlightening him, whenever he is praying. He fills man with His energies, simultaneously remaining incommensurable, incomprehensible, and apophatic [in His being]" (Grigorescu 2006, p.263; Grigorescu quotes himself from Maciej Bielawski, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. O viziune filocalică despre lume*, Deisis, Sibiu 1998).

It would definitely be a mistake to interpret this second significance in a Western "individualistic" sense. The destiny with which we are concerned here is not only the one of Father Stăniloae himself, because it also somehow belongs to Orthodoxy as a whole (and I could add that this is true for all real Orthodox theologians). As Father Dumitru Popescu aptly remarked, the main conclusion of Father Stăniloae's monograph, *The Life and the Teachings of Saint Gregory Palamas*, was that only Palamite theology could be the right answer to the overwhelming problems of contemporary man (Popescu 2002, p.17). This offers a concrete exemplification of, and support for, Father Stăniloae's credo, according to which "Orthodoxy perfectly responds to the spiritual needs of today's people that kept it alive" (Stăniloae 1970, p.730).

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Moreover, by studying the works of Saint Gregory, he became aware of the crucial role of the hesychast tradition for configuring an Orthodox dogmatics and giving support for contemporary man's condition. This position further opened up for him the real urgency of studying and translating the *Philokalia* into Romanian. In addition, one has to note that Father Stăniloae does not compose a different kind of work to that of the first editors of the *Philokalia*, because, as Ware argues, they were themselves "followers of the interpretation of Hesychasm associated with Gregory Palamas". It should be emphasised in this context that "Nikodimos [himself] edited a three-volume collection of Palamas' works, although it was never published" (Collins 2010, p.90). As is well known, Father Stăniloae included in his version of the *Philokalia* many more excerpts (and replaced certain of them) from Saint Gregory than in the original edition. This also offers clear proof that he saw a vivid continuity between the thought and practices of the Holy Fathers and the Palamite ones; and that they were destined to make a real impact on the salvation of contemporary man.

This point will be further strengthened, if we notice that the two, apparently distinct, dimensions of twentieth century Orthodox spirituality—the *Philokalic* and the Neopalamite—could be used interchangeably by referring to Father Stăniloae. For A. Louth, for instance, Father Stăniloae, along with other great names of twentieth century Orthodox theology, like Lossky, Florovsky, Meyendorff, Nellas, Mantzaridis, Archimandrite Sophrony and Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, "can be regarded as standing in a 'Philokalic' or 'Neo-Palamite' tradition" (2004, p.88). In addition, for the use of the identification of "neopatristic" with "Neopalamite" attributes, at least concerning Father Stăniloae's writings, one should see Agachi (2013).

As we have already said, what is of significance here is not just the presence of some of the landmark ideas of a "thinker" in a theological work or even in a strict individual destiny. We may say that what was determined in Saint Gregory by Father Stăniloae was the very questioning of the relationship between theology itself and Christian spiritual life—between "theory" and "practice" in Orthodoxy. Father Dumitru Popescu remarked once that "[t]he whole work of Father Stăniloae is directed by the desire to confer a spiritual foundation to the dogmatic teachings of the Church, to create a synthesis between theology and spirituality" (Popescu 2002, p.17). This urgency is not just exegetic, but also derived from the concrete situation of Orthodox life in Romania and in the Christian space.

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c. The significance of Father Stăniloae's exegesis of Saint Gregory's writings in the destiny of Orthodoxy and hesychasm in Romania

Father Stăniloae's 1938 book was not his first attempt to describe Saint Gregory's contribution to the life of Orthodoxy. We should also note here a brief study published 1929-1930: "The Way to the Divine Light in Saint Gregory Palamas". In a review of it, Archimandrite Iustin Suciu noted certain important features of Father Stăniloae's approach: the fact that Father Stăniloae worked on previously unpublished manuscripts and offered important, "new" milestones for Orthodox' faith; the recognition that the believer, at least in the Romanian space, has the opportunity to make contact with some glorious pages of the Oriental mystic tradition, previously "covered by dust". The report concludes by asserting that it would be appropriate for the author to further give the public "an accurate history of the hesychast mysticism" (excerpts from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, file nr.2672, *Revista Studii Teologice*, 2015).

In this sense, we should see Father Stăniloae's further study (but also his entire theology) as a spiritual achievement based on his previous reflections on Palamite ideas. We have in view here the study called *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man* (1943), published five years after his book on Saint Gregory. It was the first time in Romanian theology that the ontological aspect of redemption, inspired by the Holy Fathers and peculiar to the Orthodox teachings about it, was highlighted: we are thus passing from "an exposition similar to textbooks and catechisms to a theological-scientific, but also a spiritual depth" (Radu 1983, cited in Păcurariu 2002, p.50).

The links between Father Stăniloae's Palamite study, his further theology, and the true revival of Orthodoxy in the Romanian space, were all synthetically stressed by John Meyendorff:

> "In 1938, his short but extraordinarily well-documented book on *The Life and Teaching of St. Gregory Palamas* was published in Sibiu. Stăniloae's vision of God and of man's destiny abandons Western concepts shaped during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: he discovered the soteriology of the Greek Fathers, the dimensions of divine-human communion and cosmic transfiguration. His book on *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man* (1943) conveyed this discovery to a wider readership and defined Stăniloae as a pioneer of theological and spiritual revival in Romania" (1980, p.8).

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We have already seen that his pioneering contact with Palamite manuscripts strongly motivated Father Stăniloae to undertake a thorough study of the *Philokalia* and its translation into Romanian. His study on Saint Gregory was indeed appreciated as a "first" and a "significant" step" in this direction (Lemeni 2013, p.131).

We should also mention, as belonging to the same trend, the appraisal made by S. Totu. Speaking about *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man*, Totu states that maybe it is no accident that this work was written *between* the monograph about Saint Gregory in 1938 and the first volume of the *Philokalia* in 1946 "because between the *time* in which Saint Gregory Palamas defended Christianity from the anti-monastic attack [of Barlaam] and this *time*, when Father Dumitru Stăniloae decided to write, there is, maybe not by accident, an indubitable resemblance" (Totu 2015, pp.32-33).

It is hard to "accurately" estimate the result of this spiritual process, but at least we may assert the simple fact that, by so doing, he made possible the retrieval of "a tradition that previously was in agony". He initiated "the renaissance of the monastic life in Romania" (Mrozek cited by Gheorghiu 2002, p.108). Of course, the agony mentioned before should not be taken as an expression of a continuous historical state of affairs in the Romanian monastic realm, but as a sign of a certain temporary "weakness" of the hesychast movement in Romania. In fact, its history is "dotted" with such "ups and downs". Among the "ups", I should mention the Paisianist *Philokalic* movement in eighteenth century Moldavia and the intense activity of Saint Calinic of Cernica in nineteenth century Walachia.

In my opinion, there is another pertinent observation that should be stressed here. Making an appeal to the exegesis of great theologians like St Gregory Palamas (as well as St Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, St Maximus the Confessor, and St Symeon the New Theologian) is a crucial point in the particular context of the twentieth century, which was deeply affected by a violent process of modernization and characterized by extreme spiritual turmoil. What I want to stress here is that it was not by accident that the strong re-appropriation of the patristic and Palamite tradition in twentieth century Orthodoxy took place in the way that it did. The main point is that this move was not a simple hermeneutic revival of some interesting Orthodox thinkers of the past. As such, this is not a question concerning the discovery of some unknown or little known manuscripts. Father Stăniloae and many other theologians accurately saw an urgent question, understanding with sharp consciousness that only by anchoring ourselves firmly in the already proved truth of the faith of the

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Holy Fathers would we be able to navigate the troubled waters of the present and find a safe harbour in God in the future. In sum, only the firm soil of patristic-Palamite tradition offered Father Stăniloae the possibility of giving contemporary man answers to his problems, fighting from inside a living tradition that helps the theologian not only to say words, important as they may be, but just words nevertheless, and also to remember that "the saints are those who spoke about God in virtue of their personal experience" (Lemeni 2013, p.124).

We find the same statement in S. Totu, for whom "Father Stăniloae 'knew' that the world is shaken and did all he could for hesychasm to be known and lived by as many of his fellows as possible. Not coincidentally he 'appealed' first of all to Saint Gregory Palamas to remind all the believers what it means 'to see God'!" It is then also this strong existential impact that is "targeted" by him, when stressing the great importance of the Palamite doctrine. At the same time, Totu adds, it could be said that his work on the *Philokalia* is not a mere translation "in the written pages of a book, but particularly in the pages of his life" (2015, p.30).

This point should be understood in the context of the fact that Father Stăniloae explicitly embraces a position according to which Orthodoxy, representing original Christianity, is essentially linked to one that actively responds to the spiritual needs of contemporary man. Orthodoxy is not then the expression of "the strong faith of the past", valuable in and for itself, but of the eternal truth of life in God for all humans, from yesterday, today or tomorrow. For Father Stăniloae:

> "Orthodoxy is identical in its faith and cult with those of the original Christianity. But, being in its essence the prolongation of the faith, the cult and the spirituality of the undivided from the very beginning of the Church, the paradoxical and absolutely authentic fact consists in that Orthodoxy perfectly responds to today's spiritual needs of the peoples that kept it alive" (1970, p.730).

By so doing, Father Stăniloae, in my opinion, essentially echoes St Gregory's position. The same "model" of "changes in the unchanging" that characterize being and the energies may also be found in the historical process that accompanies the being of Orthodoxy itself. For Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Orthodoxy:

> "[has an intuition, which by] self-secularization it would completely lose the attention of the [contemporary] man, because this would not give him anymore the answers to the fundamental problems of salvation that

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> incessantly preoccupy him in the very core of his being. Of course, Orthodoxy adapted itself through times. [...] But this accommodation did not mean its essential change as a mystery or a replacement of its mystery with a certain ideology determined by a period or another. It has always remained the same mystery of the simple, fundamental and necessary data of the religious existence. But the mystery responds not only to these fundamental perennial needs, but also to all of the current life ones" (1970, p.731).

Let us now turn back to the Romanian context. I. Moldoveanu (2012), referring to the spirituality specific to the eighteenth century, emphasizes that "even in the absence of extensive translations of Palamite works, the Romanian monarchism [monasticism] moved in the direction traced by Saint Gregory Palamas in the 14th century". Father Stăniloae's work may be seen as a continuous effort to bring this Palamite succession to a full and also enriched consciousness of itself. The truth of St Gregory's texts should illuminate, in this particular context, the concrete space of Romanian Orthodox spirituality during its whole history. The Palamite doctrine was seen, then and now, as offering concrete support against the absolutization of the "lights of reason" specific to the eighteenth century and against the violent social and political mutations of the twentieth century.

d. The role of Father Stăniloae's work on Saint Gregory for the rediscovery of Palamite ideas in twentieth century Orthodoxy

The importance of Father Stăniloae's approach to Saint Gregory Palamas cannot be restricted to the Romanian spiritual space alone. In fact, he offered, with his 1938 study on Orthodoxy and the whole of Christianity the first extended monograph to use Palamite manuscripts, meeting thereby the requirements of a solid, modern study (Ică Jr. 2009, p.26). This aspect was acknowledged by John Meyendorff, who observed that Father Stăniloae was the first to directly quote Saint Gregory's unpublished works (Meyendorff 2009, cited in Portaru 2014, p.15). Meyendorff further adds that only "the dimensions of Father Stăniloae's work did not allow him to analyse in detail the thought of the hesychast scholar", but I presume that he is being here a little bit too optimistic or polite. To be honest, the standards of the so-called (strictly) scientific literature have rapidly evolved and tightened up since the time that Father Stăniloae published his monograph on Saint Gregory Palamas (for critical arguments on this see Henkel 2001). Beyond all doubt, his almost

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personal, direct relation with Saint Gregory through his theology remains a real model for many of us, untouched by the passage of time.

It is well known that Father Stăniloae's study was preceded in 1911 by that of the Greek theologian Gregorios Papamichail (Petroupolis-Alexandria) and by at least two other significant studies: J. Sokolov (in 1913, St. Petersburg) and of K. Dyobuniotes (in 1924) (Moravcsik 1983, p.292; for a thorough record of early Palamite studies and translations, Ică Jr. 2009 is very useful). Quite obviously, there are substantial differences between these studies and that of Father Stăniloae, both in their aim and their hermeneutic tools. For example, Papamichail's monograph "was affected by a dogmatic position, and also by its author's deficient area of documentation", so it could be stated that, in fact, "the literary activity of Palamas was sketched [here] only on the basis of the published writings" (Ică Jr. 2009, p.19).

To sum up, this is the reason why it may be asserted that "the monograph from 1938 was and remains a pioneer edition in the context of Palamite studies". There are at least two reasons contributing to this conclusion: "i) all the hermeneutic labour was concentrated on the unpublished manuscripts, which were literally plucked from obscurity; ii) his approach intertwines amazingly well the historic exegesis with the doctrinal one, even if the latter prevails" (Trif 2011).

It was even stated, with a somewhat exalted tone, that his monograph from 1938 "begins a true renaissance of Palamite studies about hesychasm in our modern times" (Păcurariu 2002, p.50), or that "we owe [to this] the bringing back of [Saint] Gregory Palamas to the attention of the Orthodox world" (Gheorghiu 2002, p.108). We should not forget that Father Stăniloae's study was written in Romanian and this strongly affected its capacity, after publication, to become a milestone for this kind of research in a much broader context.

Again, it should be stressed that Father Stăniloae was not the only one delving into this area and its result should not be restricted to the recovery of a particular, though extremely important, theologian. Starting from Saint Gregory (but not only), the aim of many theologians of the last century was to build a comprehensive and concrete synthesis for the complex world in which they lived. As Andrew Louth aptly remarked once:

> "If one looks at the Greek Fathers who are central to Fr. Dumitru—Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril, Denys, Maximos, Symeon, and Gregory Palamas—a familiar pattern emerges: for these are the Fathers central to the 'Neo-Patristic' synthesis that was so dear to Fr. Georges Florovsky, but was only sketched out in his mainly occasional writings,

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> the same Fathers to whom Vladimir Lossky had constant recourse, notably in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. This places Fr. Dumitru and his understanding of Orthodox theology among some of the Orthodox theologians whose names are most familiar in the West. He is not marginal, he is not even simply a bridge between East and West, or between Russian and Greek Orthodoxy: he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought" (2002, p.57).

Concluding Remarks

At the end of this analysis one might rightfully ask what the "true" benefit of such an endeavour is; one that identifies the deep connections between Saint Gregory and Father Dumitru Stăniloae.

I claim that, beyond important affinities of ideas and theoretical links that can be traced between the two theologians (easily identifiable on well-known historical facts), what is at stake here is the substance of Orthodox faith/life itself.

Speaking, for instance, about God's created and uncreated energies does not amount, neither for Saint Gregory nor for his Romanian "successor", to a subtle intellectual "description" of God's action in the world, but to a conceptual marking of the living framework of our relation with Him, showing us the possibilities and also the duties stemming from really being with Him. This picture also has what I might call a historical profile, which is not simply added; nor is it merely an interpretation of it, but constitutes its very essence. Orthodox truths are neither the effects of pure, "deep" intellectual analysis, nor visible expressions of breath-taking revelations of some exalted prayers. As all the Holy Fathers affirmed, such truths, as the ones of the synods, are answers revealed against the effective and powerful threats of the heresies, which find their "palpable" expression in the disruptive alterations of concrete, historical Christian life, such as those caused by/in modernity. They are, one might say, the answer of the truth to the offense of the untruth. This instils in them their "force", their capacity to be effective in individuals' lives and in the history of people.

In my opinion, this is exactly what motivated the activity of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and his special relationship with Palamite theology. This is, most likely, the profound meaning that enables us to place both of them among the Holy Fathers.

Thus, the retrieval of the Palamite writings by Father Dumitru Stăniloae (and by other important theologians) does not equate to a simple recovery of an important doctrine or the work of an exquisite theoretician

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(which could be labelled "a remarkable acquisition", like many others of this sort in the scientific landscape), but expresses a revival of Orthodox life itself in the twentieth century, as well as a corollary renewal of awareness of the depths of being Orthodox today.

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